

Quite Rightly So Invasion plans?

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Does the United States government have "any plans now to invade any other country in the foreseeable future?" Senator William Fulbright asked that question recently of Admiral Thomas Moorer, newly-selected Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the ruling elite of America's warrior princes.

A decade ago the question might have been a joke, however bad. But times have changed, as has the world's sense of humor.

Odds are the President is considering a totally unexpected new war as one possible remedy for a lot of his troubles. That war, I suggest, could start at any time and would be against Cuba.

Cuba has seldom been in the news of late. Now and then another airliner is "hijacked" to Havana, or another band of students comes to the island for sugarcane harvesting. But United States journalists nowadays seem content to view Cuba as a placid Red Blotch in a Red - White - and - Blue Caribbean Sea.

Their silence seems strange, for on April 19 Premier Fidel Castro announced that Cuban troops were fighting off an invasion. The invasion force, described by Castro as 13 American "mercenaries," has been associated with Alpha 66, a Cuban refugee "action group" in Miami.

Prior to the "invasion," Alpha 66 was one of a dwindling half-dozen refugee groups. Its forty members were often unwilling or unable to contribute enough funds to pay rent, electricity, telephone, and other bills for the group's headquarters.

But muted word of the "invasion" has changed all that. In recent weeks money has poured into Alpha 66 from Miami's 400,000 Cuban refugees and elsewhere, and hundreds of new recruits have joined. The New York Times quoted one typical new enlistee as saying, "Give us arms and we'll fight!"

The scene seems an odd parody of the Eisenhower era cry, "Unleash Chiang Kai-shek"—only here the mainland will attack the island. Meanwhile, on Cuba, the last news stories reported that only four of the invaders thus far escaped the Cuban army. Those captured had automatic weapons and plastic explosives.

Reactions all around were interesting. The U.S. Government denied prior knowledge of the "invasion" and let news sources declare it had redoubled Coast Guard efforts to

deter raids against Cuba from American territory—reportedly a frequent Coast Guard duty since 1962. Leaders of Alpha 66 announced that the invasion had not come from U.S. soil. Castro seemed content to accuse the "mercenaries" of attempting to wreck the sugar harvest; he did not link the refugee assault to the Central Intelligence Agency.

But does the CIA have a vested interest here? Or might it develop one? The signs give cause for worry.

Item: the "invasion" force landed on the eastern tip of Cuba, about 15 miles east of Baracoa in Oriente Province.

Item: this is about 55 miles from an almost-forgotten bay called

Guantanamo. The bay has held a U.S. naval base since 1903, when the then-government gave over one of those limitless Latin American "leases" to the Yankees. Viewing it as "useful to the defense of the Panama Canal," the American government has never seriously thought of leaving that base. About seven years ago Castro brought all kinds of screams from Washington when he shut off the water lines going into the base; but since then Guantanamo has been an ignored issue here.

Item: in mid-May Raul Castro returned from a six-week mission to the Soviet Union, presumably to seek replacements for the Soviet weapons put into Cuba during the mid-1950's. Reportedly the Russians turned down all Cuban requests for more and newer arms. The Soviet fleets may occasionally stop in Havana, and Russians may help brace the island against guerrilla war, but the extent of military aid Cubans can expect from other communist nations now seems seriously in question.

Item: numerous analysts now indicate that Castro will fall at least 1½ million tons short of his 10-million ton goal for the present sugar harvest. If true, this could hurt Cuban morale at home and weaken the island nation's capacity to buy arms abroad.

Item: in the Cuban refugee community a rumor echoes with increasing loudness these days. According to the rumor, some refugees plan to land on Cuba, stage a bombardment of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo, kill as many Americans as possible, and trust that President Nixon would use the situation to demand a declaration of war against Cuba from Congress.

The timing of such an act would be adjusted to panic Congressmen, to make the position of the doves and moderates untenable. It

would also need to catch the Soviets off-balance, although some would say they have been Caribbean-shy since the Cuban Missile Crisis. In short, it would be a gamble by the refugees, the CIA, and the President.

But the potential rewards are great. A declaration of war would turn all dissent into sedition, all disruption into treason. It would

legitimize any military escalation against "communism" anywhere—Cuba, Indochina or Red China. It would give the President direct control over all those little annoyances like the economy in general and labor unions in particular. And it would "mobilize" the American people behind their President, even if his name is Nixon.

All of this is speculation, of course—nightmarish speculation. But government employees at centers like the RAND Corporation are paid to create such things—called "scenarios" and considered "options." From a President who was eager to buy in the eroding stock market of a few weeks ago, perhaps a "War with Cuba" option would appear a good deal.

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